

VZCZCXRO8519  
PP RUEHBI RUEHCI  
DE RUEHCI #0153 1411153  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 201153Z MAY 08  
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2002  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1880  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 0871  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 0876  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0587  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0574  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2444

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000153

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM IN](#)

SUBJECT: OVER 30 KILLED IN LOCAL BODY ELECTIONS IN WEST BENGAL

REF: KOLKATA 148

¶1. (U) Summary: Voting in West Bengal's Panchayat (local body) elections concluded May 18. The voting took place in three separate phases and was marked by violence and intimidation, resulting in approximately 30 deaths. Compared to the last Panchayat elections in 2003, where over 70 died, this election was less violent. However, the importance of these local elections is that they give West Bengal's political parties significant control over resources and communities at the grassroots level. Election results are due May 21. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Voting in West Bengal's Panchayat elections wrapped up on May 18. The third phase of voting, however, was particularly violent. Ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) activists fought with Congress supporters in Malda and Murshidabad districts, and the news media reported 20 deaths, with the highest number of casualties occurring in Murshidabad, a Congress stronghold.

¶3. (U) The violence was not limited to battles between the CPM and opposition parties alone. During the second phase of voting on May 14, armed CPM activists moved freely around the Nandigram villages intimidating voters and in 24 South Parganas District, they also fought with supporters of the CPM's Left Front partner, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). CPM cadres allegedly bombed and set fire to the house of the West Bengal Irrigation Minister, an RSP member, killing a relative. Other media reports claimed that at least three RSP supporters died at the hands of CPM loyalists.

¶4. (U) Comment: The intra-coalition fighting, while disturbing particularly in its use and acceptance of violence as a means of ensuring political control, does not indicate a schism within the Left Front. The RSP and smaller Left Front partners do not have the strength to compete with the CPM. Winning a Panchayat election does, however, give political parties significant control over the daily lives of their constituents and opportunity for economic enrichment (and graft). In that respect, West Bengal is still very much a state of villages, and the CPM in particular maintains its control over West Bengal by exerting its influence at the grassroots level.

JARDINE